



## Principal Leadership in Fostering Positive Discipline through the Restitution Triangle in Elementary Schools

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the methods employed by school principals to promote constructive discipline via the restitution triangle in public elementary schools within the Tangse District of Pidie Regency. Data were acquired through observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving principals, teachers, students, and parents, utilizing a qualitative field study approach. The results demonstrate that the execution of the restitution triangle is still in a nascent and disjointed phase. Principals have commenced restorative procedures via reflective discussion and coaching; however, these initiatives lack consistency and have not yet been properly assimilated by teachers. Conventional punitive disciplinary methods prevail, indicating a restricted comprehension of restorative ideas. Notwithstanding these limitations, initial beneficial outcomes were observed, such as increased timeliness, heightened professional accountability, and improved communication among educators. Significant obstacles are inadequate professional development, ineffective supervisory systems, and a school culture that lacks comprehensive alignment with restorative principles. The study illustrates that the restitution triangle serves as an effective and humane framework for enhancing positive discipline in elementary schools, contingent upon ongoing leadership commitment, systematic capacity development, and a collaborative school culture.

### 1. Introduction

Discipline serves as an important basis for the organization and effectiveness of educational institutions, especially at the primary level, where essential values, habits, and professional standards are developed. In addition to governing behaviour, discipline serves as a tool for cultivating character, professional ethics, and institutional culture (Permatasari et al., 2026). In educational institutions, the discipline of educators is crucial, since it directly affects the quality of instruction, the classroom environment, and the development of students' character (Permatasari et al., 2025). Nonetheless, disciplinary methods in numerous educational environments continue to be primarily punitive, depending on fines, warnings, and hierarchical authority instead of reflective and value-oriented strategies (Rachmawati et al., 2025). Conventional punitive discipline has under growing criticism for its inadequate efficacy in fostering lasting behavioural change. Sanction-based techniques may

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achieve immediate compliance, but they frequently neglect to cultivate internal awareness, accountability, or professional dedication (Ekawati et al., 2023). Furthermore, punitive measures threaten to erode teachers' professional dignity, diminish motivation, and foster a culture of fear instead of trust (Marwan et al., 2024). In light of these constraints, modern educational leadership literature underscores the necessity for positive and restorative disciplinary frameworks that promote conversation, reflection, and accountability rooted in collective values (Yuting et al., 2022).

Positive discipline embodies a methodology aimed at fostering self-regulation, accountability, and ethical consciousness, rather than compliance motivated by external authority (Yuan et al., 2022). In this context, restorative practices have emerged as a prominent alternative approach for resolving behavioral disorders in a more humane and sustainable way (Jarilkapovich, 2024). The restitution triangle, proposed by Diane Gossen, is a restorative approach that highlights three interrelated stages: stabilizing identity, validating misconduct, and reconnecting persons to shared values or beliefs (Apple et al., 2022). This method reconceptualizes discipline as a learning experience that rehabilitates relationships, upholds dignity, and enhances personal accountability (Saboor et al., 2024).

The effective execution of restorative discipline is significantly reliant on school leadership (Kim et al., 2024). Principals serve as strategic instructional and cultural leaders who influence policies, norms, and daily practices in schools (Payne & Welch, 2022). Their leadership dictates whether restorative concepts are merely symbolic or genuinely integrated into institutional practices (Fine, 2024). Principals are accountable for establishing disciplinary procedures, exemplifying restorative behavior, mentoring teachers in reflective practices, and cultivating a school culture that promotes ongoing professional development (Martinez et al., 2022). In the absence of robust and consistent leadership, restorative disciplinary projects are likely to become disjointed and superficial (Samimi et al., 2023).

In the Indonesian educational context, especially in public elementary schools in rural and semi-rural regions, the shift from punitive to restorative discipline has distinct obstacles (Makniyah & Romlah, 2022). Initial observations at public elementary schools within Tangse District, Pidie Regency, reveal that while the notion of positive discipline is increasingly acknowledged, its implementation remains irregular (Prmono et al., 2024). A multitude of educators persist in utilizing traditional disciplinary techniques seen as more effective and less time-intensive (Agustyawati & Farisatma, 2024). Restricted access to professional development, inadequate supervision, and entrenched disciplinary practices further impede the use of restorative methodologies like the restitution triangle (Satriah & Hadisaputra, 2025).

The disparity between theoretical expectations and practical execution underscores the necessity for empirical research on the enactment of restorative discipline within educational institutions (Abubakar et al., 2025). There is a lack of research investigating how principals strategically employ the restitution triangle to promote good discipline among teachers, the responses of school stakeholders to this methodology, and the concrete outcomes resulting from its implementation (Palupy & Sauri, 2025). Comprehending these dynamics is crucial for guiding leadership practices and policy measures designed to enhance school discipline sustainably and humanely.

This study seeks to investigate key ways for establishing constructive discipline via the restitution triangle in public elementary schools within the Tangse District of Pidie Regency. The research examines three primary elements: the function of administrators in executing the restitution triangle, the involvement of teachers and students in facilitating or hindering restorative discipline, and the effect of restitution-oriented tactics on teachers' disciplinary conduct. This study aims to enhance the existing literature on restorative leadership and positive discipline through a comprehensive

qualitative analysis, while delivering practical insights for school leaders and policymakers striving to implement value-driven and sustainable disciplinary practices in elementary education.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1 Research Design*

This study conducted a qualitative field research design to develop a comprehensive understanding of significant strategies for promoting constructive discipline through the restitution triangle in public elementary schools (Roulston & Choi, 2017). A qualitative approach proved suitable as the study aimed to investigate processes, meanings, perceptions, and experiences of educational stakeholders rather than to quantify variables statistically. Field study allowed the researcher to document the authentic background of disciplinary practices as they naturally occur within the school environment.

### *2.2 Research Setting and Duration*

The study was performed at public elementary schools situated in the Tangse District of Pidie Regency, Aceh Province, Indonesia. This site was chosen for its relevance to the research objective, as schools in this district have initiated positive and restorative discipline methods while encountering institutional and cultural limitations. Data collection occurred in the first semester of the 2025 academic year, predominantly during school hours, to facilitate direct observation of everyday disciplinary routines and leadership practices.

### *2.3 Research Participants*

Participants in the research were chosen by purposive sampling, determined by their responsibilities and direct engagement in school discipline and leadership procedures. The participants included school principals, educators, students, and parents. Principals were designated as important informants owing to their authority and accountability in devising and executing disciplinary tactics. Teachers were chosen due to their pivotal role in enforcing discipline within classroom and school environments. Students and parents were incorporated to offer supplementary viewpoints on the perceived effects and execution of restorative discipline approaches.

The study involved a total of 21 participants, including three administrators, nine teachers, three pupils, three parents, and three educational staff members. This structure facilitated data triangulation and ensured a thorough grasp of disciplinary practices from many stakeholder viewpoints.

### *2.4 Data Collection Methods*

Data were collected using three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation.

- **Observation**  
Participant observation was conducted to examine how principals and teachers enacted disciplinary practices in everyday school activities. Observations focused on leadership interactions, teacher punctuality, communication patterns, responses to disciplinary issues, and the application of restorative dialogue. Field notes were systematically recorded to capture behavioral patterns, contextual factors, and informal interactions relevant to the restitution triangle.
- **Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, students, and parents. The interview protocol was designed to explore participants' understanding of positive discipline, experiences with the restitution triangle, perceived benefits, and challenges encountered during implementation. This flexible interview format allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring alignment with the research objectives.

- **Documentation**

Document analysis was used to complement observational and interview data. Documents reviewed included school regulations, disciplinary guidelines, supervision records, meeting minutes, and relevant policy documents. These materials provided institutional context and helped verify the consistency between formal policies and actual practices.

### *2.5 Research Instrument*

Consistent with qualitative research standards, the researcher functioned as the principal research instrument, tasked with data collection, interpretation, and reflexive analysis. Supporting instruments comprised interview guides, observation protocols, audio recordings, and reflective field notes. Reflexivity was upheld during the study process to mitigate researcher bias and improve analytical transparency.

### *2.6 Data Analysis*

Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data gathering, employing an interactive paradigm that included data reduction, data display, and conclusion formulation. Initially, raw data from interviews, observations, and documents were transcribed and systematically organized. Subsequent to this, pertinent information was systematically coded and classified into categories corresponding to the research objectives, including leadership tactics, restorative practices, teacher responses, and implementation obstacles. Patterns and relationships among themes were examined to produce significant interpretations and findings.

## **3. Results**

### *3.1 The Role of School Principals in Applying the Restitution Triangle to Foster Positive Discipline Among Teachers.*

The responsibility of school principals in executing the Restitution Triangle as a method to promote healthy discipline among educators in public primary schools within Tangse District, Pidie Regency. Data were obtained via comprehensive interviews with two principals: the principle of SDN Blang Pandak and the principal of SDN Sarah Panyang. The findings indicate that although both principals recognize the significance of positive discipline, variations in leadership attitude significantly influence the approach and efficacy of the Restitution Triangle's implementation.

The principal of SDN Blang Pandak has a contemplative and empathetic leadership style grounded upon substantial experience overseeing a rural elementary school. His professional journey has led him to understand that sustainable school improvement encompasses not just academic achievement but also the development of character, emotional safety, and mutual respect among members of the school community. In this perspective, positive discipline is regarded as a fundamental component for creating a supportive learning environment that fosters personal development for both educators and learners. His desire to adopt positive discipline is based on a conscious departure from punitive and authoritarian disciplinary approaches, which he deems incompatible with modern educational and developmental requirements. He adopts a methodology

focused on empathy, relationship cultivation, and self-regulation. The Restitution Triangle is regarded as an effective structure that upholds these principles by prioritizing the repair of relationships, the restoration of shared beliefs, and the cultivation of intrinsic motivation over the imposition of punitive measures.

The Restitution Triangle is a systematic reflective process that facilitates individuals in recognizing errors, pinpointing unmet needs, and assuming accountability for restoring values. The principal's application notably encompasses not only student discipline but also faculty behavior and professional conduct. This inclusive strategy demonstrates his conviction that positive discipline should be regularly integrated throughout all tiers of the school system. The implementation of the Restitution Triangle at SDN Blang Pandak occurred through a progressive and dialogic approach. The initial transmission took place through casual conversations in routine meetings, bolstered by contextual examples from everyday classroom scenarios. As educators' comprehension advanced, the principal conducted intimate mentorship sessions and disseminated pertinent practices to enhance conceptual clarity. This progressive process enabled educators to assimilate the concept without encountering cognitive or emotional opposition.

The Restitution Triangle has been formally included into school administration processes for over two years. It is utilized for managing student misconduct, resolving interpersonal disputes, and evaluating instructor effectiveness. The application adheres to a systematic process that includes active listening, recognition of fundamental requirements, and joint problem-solving. This technique empowers instructors and students as active participants in problem-solving, hence enhancing accountability and professional responsibility. To enhance positive discipline, the principal implements many strategic initiatives, such as the internalization of value-based standards, the development of reflective practices, the reinforcement of empathetic communication, and the exhibition of example leadership conduct. He underscores the importance of leadership credibility, asserting that instructors are more inclined to embrace constructive discipline when it is constantly exemplified by the principal. In educational settings, instructors are urged to present errors as chances for learning and to assist students in the processes of identity stabilization, needs validation, and collaborative solution development. This methodology has fostered more tranquil classroom environments, elevated respect for student dignity, and strengthened teacher-student relationships.

The leadership style of SDN Sarah Panyang exhibits a more authoritative stance, influenced by extensive experience with ongoing disciplinary issues. The principal's leadership style is defined by strictness, stringent oversight, and a focus on adherence, which she views as essential to mitigate persistent disciplinary problems among educators and kids. Her motivation in applying positive discipline primarily stems from anger with perceived irregularities in teachers' compliance with school regulations. While she advocates for constructive discipline and use the Restitution Triangle as a disciplinary framework, its implementation is significantly influenced by her predominant leadership style. She envisions the Restitution Triangle chiefly as a remedial framework that compels educators and learners to recognize errors and avert their repetition. Collaboration and introspective discussion, essential to the restorative aspect of the approach, are subordinated to authoritative control and procedural compliance.

The implementation of the Restitution Triangle at SDN Sarah Panyang was executed using formal and authoritative methods, lacking prior discussion or collaborative understanding. Educators were directed to apply the methodology consistently, supported by clear expectations and institutional coercion. Implementation commenced roughly one year before the study and is sustained by rigorous oversight, regular assessments, and immediate sanctions for non-compliance. Although the framework is officially implemented, its focus persists on outcomes and rule enforcement rather than on emotional processing and intrinsic motivation. To strengthen discipline, the principal instituted

additional regulations, heightened oversight, and enforced stringent penalties for violations of school policies. She recognizes that these methods may not completely conform to the philosophical tenets of positive discipline; yet, she considers them essential for establishing authority and facilitating behavioral modification. In educational practice, instructors are mandated to implement the Restitution Triangle under stringent oversight, accompanied by obligatory reporting systems that exemplify a centralized governance framework.

The comparison findings highlight the significant impact of principal leadership on the execution of the Restitution Triangle and the overall atmosphere of constructive discipline. Both principals acknowledge the strategic significance of the strategy; yet, differing leadership styles result in distinctly varied implementations. Democratic and compassionate leadership promotes enhanced internalization, reflective practice, and collective accountability among educators. In contrast, authoritative leadership, although effective in ensuring consistency, often restricts the transformative capacity of positive discipline by emphasizing conformity rather than personal development. The findings emphasize that the efficacy of the Restitution Triangle is influenced not only by its theoretical implementation but also by the leadership context in which it is applied. The principal's function as a role model, facilitator, and cultural architect is a crucial factor in promoting genuine constructive discipline among elementary school instructors.

### *3.2 The Roles of Students and Teachers in Supporting and Constraining the Implementation of Positive Discipline Through the Restitution Triangle.*

Interview data from SDN Blang Pandak reveal that the execution of positive discipline via the Restitution Triangle is influenced by the interaction of teacher initiative, student responsiveness, and environmental factors both within and outside the classroom. The Restitution Triangle serves not merely as a technical technique but as a relational and interpretive process, with its efficacy contingent upon the comprehension and application of its principles by educational stakeholders in daily practice. From the standpoint of the classroom instructor, the implementation of positive discipline is chiefly facilitated by the teacher's educational approach and emotional involvement. The participant articulates a conscious shift in disciplinary practice from control-oriented responses to reflective processes that prioritize emotional stabilization, recognition of fundamental needs, and the reestablishment of accountability. This suggests that the Restitution Triangle serves as a framework for interpreting student misconduct as a developmental indicator rather than as an offense necessitating punishment. This recontextualization fosters the development of a classroom environment that prioritizes discourse, emotional security, and collective responsibility.

Students have a dual role in this process, both enhancing and limiting the efficacy of restorative discipline. Students exhibiting emotional preparedness and a willingness to engage in discourse are better equipped to participate in reflective processes, therefore enhancing the desired effects of constructive discipline. In contrast, students influenced by punishing or inconsistent disciplinary experiences outside of school often demonstrate delayed adjustment or resistance. This variation indicates that student involvement with the Restitution Triangle is influenced by earlier socialization, which affects their understanding of non-punitive disciplinary measures.

The familial environment appears as a crucial external variable affecting implementation. Discrepancies between restorative techniques in educational settings and authoritarian punishment at home result in inconsistencies in behavioral expectations. This imbalance creates cognitive and emotional strain for kids, undermining the internalization of self-regulatory values advocated by positive discipline. The Restitution Triangle's focus on inner motivation and moral autonomy is limited by external reinforcement systems that favor compliance over introspection.

In addition to student-related aspects, the analysis underscores the impact of institutional dynamics among educators and school administration. The participant recognizes primary support as an essential enabling factor that validates the implementation of restorative methods and maintains teacher dedication. Leadership approaches that offer explicit guidance, motivation, and opportunities for reflection foster a collective comprehension of constructive discipline within the educational institution. The variety in instructors' disciplinary procedures creates structural inconsistency. When restorative and punitive methods coexist, children encounter disjointed disciplinary signals, diminishing the coherence and collective efficacy of the Restitution Triangle. Notwithstanding these limitations, the classroom teacher's enduring dedication demonstrates a comprehension of discipline as a protracted cultural process rather than a mere immediate behavioural control strategy. This viewpoint emphasizes that the execution of positive discipline necessitates continuous negotiation, professional coherence, and the gradual absorption of values. The data indicate that the efficacy of the Restitution Triangle depends not solely on individual teacher practices or student adherence, but also on the extent of congruence among classroom interactions, institutional leadership, and wider socio-cultural contexts.

The interview analysis identifies instructors as essential mediators who convert restorative ideas into tangible classroom practices, while students influence outcomes through their emotional preparedness and previous disciplinary encounters. The Restitution Triangle emerges as a context-dependent disciplinary framework, whose efficacy depends on institutional coherence and collective commitment across educational stakeholders and settings.

### *3.3 Effects of the Principal's Implementation of the Restitution Triangle Strategy on Teacher Discipline in Schools.*

Analysis of interview data from principals of public elementary schools in Tangse District, Pidie Regency, reveals that the application of the Restitution Triangle strategy significantly enhances teachers' disciplinary behaviour, although the implementation dynamics vary among schools. The technique serves as a reflective and dialogical process that fosters discipline based on internal awareness and professional accountability, rather than acting as a punitive control mechanism.

At SDN Blang Pandak, the principal employs the Restitution Triangle by engaging in open and ongoing communication with teachers in response to disciplinary infractions. Educators are prompted to contemplate the fundamental reasons for their actions and are urged to develop pragmatic enhancement strategies. This method reconceptualizes discipline as a mechanism of professional self-regulation instead of external enforcement. The interview data indicate that this dialogical and supportive approach has led to noticeable enhancements in teachers' punctuality, administrative accountability, and interpersonal communication. The heightened motivation and sense of appreciation among teachers suggest that the Restitution Triangle serves not only to rectify behavior but also to enhance professional identity and foster collegial trust. This method seems to foster a collaborative and supportive work atmosphere where positive discipline is a collective norm rather than a mandated requirement.

In SDN Sarah Panyang, the Restitution Triangle is implemented via a more systematic and established procedure. Educators who breach disciplinary standards are encouraged to participate in personal, in-person discussions with the principal to elucidate their conduct and collaboratively determine remedial measures. The objective is to cultivate self-awareness and inner discipline; nevertheless, the analysis indicates that the results are more incremental and inconsistent. Certain educators exhibit notable enhancements in attendance, work fulfilment, and instructional preparedness, while others find the reflective process to be onerous or taxing. This indicates that the efficacy of the Restitution Triangle in this setting is influenced by instructors' willingness to

participate in ongoing self-reflection and by the extent to which the method is viewed as supporting rather than supervisory.

The data suggest that leadership style significantly influences the effect of the Restitution Triangle on teachers' disciplinary behaviour. A dialogical and relational leadership approach, seen in SDN Blang Pandak, enhances the assimilation of positive disciplinary concepts and expedites cultural transformation. Conversely, a more formal and structured implementation, shown by SDN Sarah Panyang, continues to enhance behaviour but generally yields slower and less uniformly dispersed results.

The data indicates that the Restitution Triangle technique enhances instructors' disciplinary behaviour by transitioning the focus of discipline from external penalties to internal reflection and accountability. While variations in implementation affect the speed and extent of change, both situations indicate that ongoing discourse, reflective involvement, and steadfast leadership are essential for establishing a cooperative, reflective, and disciplined professional culture in elementary school environments.

## 5. Conclusions

This study shows that the application of the Restitution Triangle technique by school principals significantly enhances teachers' disciplinary conduct in public elementary schools. The results indicate that discipline based on reflective conversation and self-awareness is more sustainable than methods dependent on external control or punishment. When principals frame discipline as a mechanism for professional development, teachers are more inclined to take accountability for their conduct and participate in ongoing self-regulation. The data suggests that leadership style significantly mediates the effectiveness of the Restitution Triangle. Dialogical and supportive leadership promotes the profound internalization of positive discipline, building a collaborative and trust-oriented school culture. In contrast, more structured and formal applications, although still beneficial in enhancing specific disciplinary behaviours, generally provide slower and less consistent results. This indicates that the transformative capacity of the Restitution Triangle is optimized when its restorative principles are continually linked with relational leadership methodologies. The study emphasizes that the efficacy of positive discipline tactics relies not merely on the implementation of a framework, but on its execution inside the school's organizational culture. Continuous reflection, transparent communication, and consistent leadership are vital for establishing constructive discipline as a collective professional standard among teachers.

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